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*Philosophy as an exercise :
figures of Ancient Greek Thought*

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Jacques Brunschwig, « On our own ground in a distant country », p. 15, in: *Le Savoir Grec*.

The Greek alphabet, halfway between the strange and the familiar, is at the right distance from our own alphabet, of which it is the ancestor. It disorients us enough that we do not feel at home when we visit it. It welcomes us, enough to prevent us from falling into an unreadable abyss. [...] Its paradoxical kinship is a brief but illuminating metaphor for the complex relationship that links our present to a past that is also ours, and which continues to inhabit it, visibly or invisibly. [...] The impression of familiarity and the feeling of distance play out their complex interplay; we are on our own ground in a distant country.

The Greek mirror of Western philosophy: two pictures in the same mirror

- The theoretical *logos* of philosophy as system and science : *épistémè*
- The practical *logos* of philosophy as exercise and wisdom : *sophia*

Pierre Hadot : « The philosophical works of the ancients [...] are intended to shape souls »

What makes a philosophy? The two definitions of *hairesis* (αἵρεσις)

Diogenes Laërtius [DL, IIIe c. AD], *Lives and doctrines of eminent philosophers* :

DL I 19 : In his treatise about the schools of philosophy (Περὶ αἱρέσεων), Hippobotus says that there are nine philosophical schools (αἱρέσεις/haireseis) ou trends of thought (ἀγωγὰς/agôgas) ; but neither the Cynic, nor the eliac, nor the dialectical one.

DL VI 103 : We think that the Cynic philosophy too is a philosophical school (αἵρεσιν), and not, as some claim, a way of life (ἐνστάσιν βίου).

Diogenes Laertius I 19 : Indeed, most <doxographers> do not include Pyrrhonism either, because of *aphasia* (διὰ τὴν ἀφασίαν). Some, however, say that in one sense it is a philosophical school (αἵρεσιν), but in another sense it is not. On the one hand, it does indeed seem to be a school. We call a 'philosophical school', they say, one that consistently derive from a certain *logos* following appearances (τὴν λόγῳ τινὶ κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀκολουθοῦσαν). In this sense, it is right to call skepticism a 'philosophical school'. But if we conceive of a philosophical school as joining to doctrines that have a consecution (τὴν λόγῳ τινὶ κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀκολουθοῦσαν), it could no longer be called a philosophical school, because it has no doctrines (δόγματα).

Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhonian Hypotyposis*, I 16-17:

Does the skeptic have a philosophical school (αἵρεσιν)? If we say that a school is joining to a plurality of doctrines (πρόσκλησιν δόγμασι πολλοῖς) that are consistent with each other and with appearances (ἀκολουθίαν πρὸς ἀλληλά τε καὶ φαινόμενα) (...) we would say that skeptics do not have a school. But if we declare that a school is a way of conduct (ἀγωγήν) that consistently follows a certain *logos* (λόγῳ τινὶ ἀκολουθοῦσαν), a *logos* that shows how it seems possible to live righteously (...) we will say that the skeptic has a school.

The formulaic *logos* of the skeptics

Diogenes Laertius, IX 61 : Pyrrho said that nothing is beautiful or shameful, just or unjust, and that, similarly, in all cases, nothing truly exists, and that men do everything according to convention and habit; for each thing is no more this than that (οὐ γὰρ μᾶλλον τόδε ἢ τόδε εἶναι ἕκαστον)

DL IX 76 : The expression ‘no more than’ (οὐδὲν μᾶλλον) means, as Timo says in his Python, ‘not to determine anything, but to withhold judgment’

Sextus Empiricus PH I 18 [187] : By using each of these modes of suspension of assent, we utter certain expressions that reveal our skeptical disposition and our emotions (φωνάς τινὰς τῆς σκεπτικῆς διαθέσεως καὶ τοῦ περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθους μηνυτικάς) – for example, by using ‘no more’ (οὐ μᾶλλον), ‘nothing should be determined’ (οὐδὲν ὀριστέον) and a few other expressions.

DL IX 61 : Pyrrho philosophized in a very noble way, introducing in Greece the philosophical form of non-understanding and suspension of judgment (τὸ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας καὶ ἐποχῆς εἶδος εἰσαγαγών). [...] Indeed, according to him, each thing is no more this than that.

DL IX 62 : Pyrrho was consistent in his life as well (ἀκόλουθος δ' ἦν καὶ τῷ βίῳ), deviating from nothing, paying attention to nothing, vehicles, if there were any, precipices, dogs, and all things of that sort, relying on his senses in nothing. However, according to Antigones of Carystus, he survived thanks to his familiars.

DL IX 62 : Pyrrho replied that it was difficult to completely shed one's humanity (ἐκδῦναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον).

Become a philosopher : not just a matter of learning but of exercise (ἄσκησις)

Epictetus, *Diss.* II 9

Philosophers recommend not just learning (μαθεῖν), but adding regular practice (μελέτην) and then exercise (ἄσκησις). [...] Among us everybody is capable of deliver a scholarly discourse about good and evil. (...) But it is one thing to store bread and wine, it is another to eat them. What is eaten is digested and distributed throughout the body, becoming nerves, flesh, bones, blood, giving a beautiful complexion.

Epictetus, *Diss.* III 3

In the same way that we practice (γυμναζόμεθα) to deal with sophistical questions, we should also practice daily to deal with representations (φαντασίας); for they too ask questions to us. Her son has died. Answer: « It is not a matter of choice, it is not bad » (ἀπροαίρετον, οὐ κακόν). His father has disinherited him; what do you think? « Not a matter of choice, not bad ». Caesar condemned him : « not a matter of choice, not bad ». He was distressed by it : « matter of choice, bad » (προαιρετικόν, κακόν). He bore it nobly: « matter of choice, good » (προαιρετικόν, ἀγαθόν). If we accustom ourselves in this way (έθιζόμεθα), we will make progress; for we will never give our assent to anything but a true and unflinching representation.

« On our own ground in a distant country »:

ancient greek philosophy standing somewhere
between East and West ?